

Spring 2009



# UPDATE

## Phosphate Mine Site Investigations in Southeast Idaho

### **Dear Interested Citizen:**

State, federal, and tribal agencies, are overseeing environmental investigations at four mine sites in Southeast Idaho.

### **For more information, contact:**

#### **Conda Mine**

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Investigations of contamination at four mine sites in Southeast Idaho have begun under the oversight of the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the USDA Forest Service:

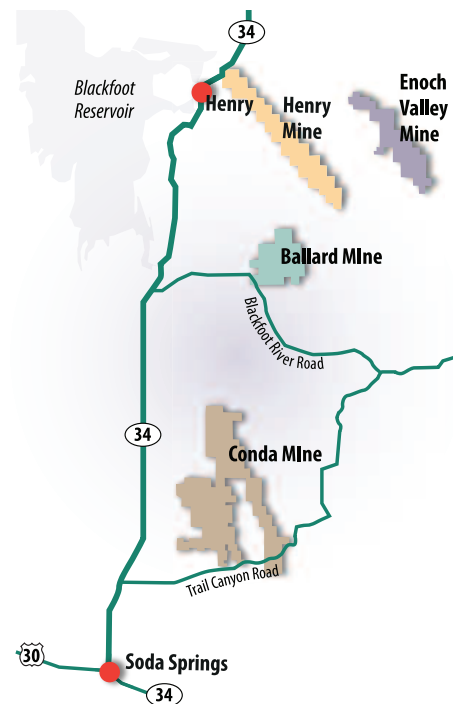
- The former Conda/Woodall Mountain Phosphate Mine (Conda Mine) located approximately 8 miles northeast of Soda Springs, Idaho, in Caribou County
- Ballard Mine, about 12 miles north of Soda Springs
- Enoch Valley Mine, about 19 miles northeast of Soda Springs
- Henry Mine, about 15 miles north of Soda Springs and about 4 miles southeast of Henry, Idaho.

#### **Conda Mine**

Under the terms of an agreement between the agencies and J.R. Simplot Company, the mining company will investigate the Conda site with oversight by the agencies. They will develop a remedial investigation and feasibility study (RI/FS) to determine what cleanup actions are necessary to address any contamination resulting from mining at the site. The RI/FS will document the nature and extent of any contamination from selenium or other contaminants released by mining activities, evaluate any threat to human health or the environment posed by the release of the contaminant(s), and develop and analyze cleanup options. This cleanup will be done under the federal Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA) and appropriate state law.

#### **Ballard, Enoch Valley and Henry Mines**

A similar situation exists at the Ballard, Enoch Valley and Henry mines. The mining company at these sites is P4 Production, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Monsanto Company. At the P4 mine sites, investigations have been underway since 2004. P4 and the agencies are now determining what additional information needs to be collected to complete investigations at these mines.



#### **Community Interviews**

*An important part of the CERCLA cleanup process is participation by local stakeholders and interested citizens. Community interviews early in the process will solicit input from the public about how best to communicate progress during the course of the investigation, and will help to ensure that agencies have an accurate picture of past site operations as well as residents' concerns and interests. This input will guide development of a community involvement plan.*

## Site History and Environmental Background

Southeast Idaho is one of the world's major phosphate producing regions, and phosphate mining has been an important industry here since the early 20th century. In Caribou and adjacent counties, phosphate mining has resulted in waste rock dumps and open pits that contain materials high in selenium and metals. Past studies – including voluntary mining company investigations, area-wide investigations, mine-specific studies and others – have identified these waste rock dumps as hazardous substance sources that may pose a risk to human health and/or the environment. These contaminants are known or suspected to be present in groundwater, surface water, sediment, soils and plants and can be transported beyond the former mining areas.

### The CERCLA Process

Enacted in 1980, CERCLA allows EPA and other authorized federal agencies to clean up sites and to compel responsible parties to perform cleanups or reimburse the government for costs incurred to clean up the sites.

The purpose of a RI/FS is to gather enough information to characterize a release, then develop and analyze alternatives for cleaning up releases in compliance with laws and regulations. For the Conda, Ballard, Enoch Valley and Henry mines, the DEQ and other agencies need additional information about aquatic and terrestrial species, reclamation conditions, and groundwater characteristics to plan cleanup activities.

### CERCLA and Community Involvement

CERCLA community involvement guidelines say that members of the public affected by a cleanup site have a right to know about activities taking place in their community and to have a say in the decision-making process. The agencies, Tribes and mining companies participating in the investigations of the Conda, Ballard, Henry and Enoch Valley mines welcome public involvement throughout the process because they believe it ultimately produces better cleanup decisions.

### Information Repository

CERCLA also requires that all major documents related to an environmental investigation and cleanup be made available for public inspection and copying at a central location called an information repository. The information repository for these mine sites is at the IDEQ Pocatello Regional Office 444 Hospital Way, #300, Pocatello, ID 83201. For document requests, contact Kasey Guthrie in writing at this address, by email at [Kasey.Guthrie@deq.idaho.gov](mailto:Kasey.Guthrie@deq.idaho.gov), or by phone at 208-236-6160 or 888-655-6160 (toll free).

### What is selenium?

*Widely present in nature in most rocks and soils, selenium is associated with waste rock dumps and other mining practices. Selenium can have both beneficial and harmful health effects: low doses help to maintain good health, but exposure to high levels can cause adverse effects in humans, wildlife and other animals. Elevated levels of selenium and potentially hazardous metals have been detected on and near phosphate mines in Southeast Idaho.*

